

(Washington, DC)— Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-Wisc.), Vice Chair of the Congressional Women's Caucus, yesterday joined fellow members of the Women's Caucus, Obama administration officials, Afghan health experts and Women's Policy, Inc., to discuss maternal health in Afghanistan. She introduced His Excellency Dr. Sayed Mohammed Amin Fatimi, the Minister of Public Health for Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, about one in eight women die in childbirth. The country has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world, following Sierra Leone.

"The maternal mortality rate is a great indicator of how any country's health care system is working," Congresswoman Moore said. "Indeed, it is a clear indicator of the status of women. So when one in eight mothers is dying in pregnancy or childbirth, we are talking about a crisis. We are talking about a country that is in great turmoil."

"When we talk about the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, the health of their women is one of the issues that we cannot just leave behind. These women and children are not just collateral damage in a broader conflict; they are canaries in the coal mine. We ignore the problem at our peril. Their status is a reflection of the status of society, and we have an obligation to work toward both increasing their access to health care and improving those health delivery systems."

Recognizing our global interconnectedness, Congresswoman Moore has been a consistent advocate of reducing maternal and infant mortality rates at home and abroad. More than 500,000 women worldwide die from pregnancy each year, and millions more endure life-threatening complications. In the U.S., a woman has a 1 in 4,800 risk of death related to pregnancy, as compared to a 1 in 47,800 risk in Ireland and a one in eight risk in Afghanistan. In Congresswoman Moore's district of Milwaukee, the Department of Health reports that the infant mortality rate is the seventh worst among 53 major U.S. cities.

As Congress works toward an overhaul of health care in the United States, Congresswoman Moore remains an ardent supporter of ensuring access to preventative care that will reduce negative health outcomes for women and children.

In the recent Foreign Operations Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2010, which passed the House of Representatives July 9, 2009, Congresswoman Moore secured a \$10 million increase in funds dedicated to improving maternal health worldwide. The House also passed a Moore amendment to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act in June, calling attention to women's rights and education in Afghanistan.

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